

March 14, 2001

Honorable John L. Martin, Senate Chair
Honorable Scott W. Cowger, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Natural Resources
115 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0115

Re: LD 578, An Act to Assist Municipalities in Developing and Using
Geographic Information Systems to Track Development and Promote
Smart Growth

Dear Senator Martin and Representative Cowger:

The Commission offers this written testimony in support of LD 578, An Act to Assist Municipalities in Developing and Using Geographic Information Systems to Track Development and Promote Smart Growth.

The Commission supports the expansion of our statewide Geographic Information System (GIS) infrastructure. LD578 will enable the further expansion of this important technical resource. While this bill is directed at the development and use of GIS capabilities to track "patterns of development and associated land use planning and to assist municipalities with the use of these tools," we believe that the benefits produced by GIS can go far beyond the initial purpose of the data collection effort. Databases or other capabilities developed as a result of this bill will be available to other agencies contributing to the ability of state, municipal and federal agencies to cooperate and coordinate their efforts. The current E-9-1-1 effort is an example of how State and municipal governments have found GIS-enabled cooperation a very useful tool for both levels of government.

During our preparation for events that could challenge the delivery of utility services (e.g., severe weather), we have recognized the need to develop a capability for the efficient exchange of data between local and State governments. GIS offers this capability and more. As the infrastructure develops and databases become available, not only will we be able to work with utilities and other state agencies to better prepare for such events, but also we will be able to ensure a more rapid recovery.

Finally, one of the enormous strengths of GIS is that, in some ways, like the Internet, it builds upon itself: once accurate data is gathered and incorporated, it can be used, and correlated with other data, indefinitely. Put another way, the more the system is expanded and used, the more valuable it will become to all who use it. Thus we believe that funding GIS now will prove to be a valuable investment for Maine's citizens.

We urge the Committee to vote out LD 578 as "ought to pass." I would be pleased to provide further information about how we use GIS and how we expect to use it in the future should the Committee wishes us to do so.

Sincerely,

Thomas L. Welch, Chairman
Maine Public Utilities Commission